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ABSTRACT

A simple, flexible approach of planning for small colleges is presented after which action can be patterned. Alternative methods are described for carrying out the important activities found in most processes designed to generate a long-range institutional plan. A rationale for planning is offered along with a discussion of what planning can do for a college. Basic assumptions underlying institutional planning are outlined. The cyclical nature of planning processes is discussed, as well as the distinction between planning and decision-making. "Score card" techniques for data collection and suggestions for restricting the amounts of data gathered are also considered. Component (any organizational unit) planning is reviewed as a means of determining an overall plan. A 30-item bibliography is included. (LBH)

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A PLANNING APPROACH FOR SMALL COLLEGES

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INTRODUCTION

Planning processes for small colleges must be as unique as the colleges which employ them. At the same time, however, when one simply outlines a planning process or system, many will attempt to "put it on" their organization right off the rack. Unfortunately the left sleeve may be a little long, the waist a bit snug, and one pant leg may stop at mid-calf. Such misfits leave the wearers of that planning "suit" feeling uncomfortable and angry with the tailor.

What follows is meant to be a relatively simple, flexible approach to planning rather than a rigid "system" or "model." This "approach" should be seen as something after which action can be patterned. It can (and should) be adjusted and modified where necessary to make it appropriate to any college which attempts to use it. Thus, thoughout the pages that follow, alternative methods are described for carrying out the important activities found in most processes designed to generate a long-range institutional plan. Those who attempt to employ the approach described herein must extract those elements and techniques which are appropriate to their college's needs and style and pass over the rest.

Preceding the actual description of the planning approach are several pages of important background. A clear understanding of these issues must be achieved before meaningful work can be undertaken.

WHY PLAN?

Dr. Kirby Godsey, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Mercer University, has outlined a number of important principles for college administrators. Among them is one particularly pertinent to the discussion at hand: If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up someplace else.

Putting it another way (again in someone else's words), "The difference between an organization which uses a planning style . . . and an organization which (doesn't) is like the difference between electricity flowing through wires in my house between a switch and a porch light and electricity flowing in an unanticipated, unpredictable bolt of lightning from a storm cloud to the earth." (DeBoer).

Both Godsey and DeBoer make the same point. A planned college moves consistently in a unified direction about which there is general consensus throughout the college community. Most members of the college community share a clear sense of the college's future path and are constantly aware of that path so that all

institutional decision-making takes that direction into account. Resources are allocated in a way consistent with the achievement of that direction. The need to back away from or significantly alter a major decision is rare.

There is undoubtedly substantial external pressure on colleges to employ some sort of planning process. Accrediting agencies point out its importance in their accreditation reviews. External funding agencies demand to varying degrees that their benefactors demonstrate they know where they are headed. Probably the most stringent insistence on planning is found in the Advanced Institutional Development Program (AIDP) administered by the U.S. Office of Education under Title III of the Higher Education Act.

Although external stimuli may be important, it is obvious after reviewing planning activities in dozens of small colleges that the commitment to planning must be, above all, an internal one or planning simply will not work. There must be a firm belief that a planned, orderly existence is better than an ad hoc approach. The commitment must start at the top with the governing board and the president (who is, after all, the chief planning officer) and must extend through all who are part of institutional life.

In order for a commitment to planning to be meaningful, however, there must be a parallel and equally strong commitment to use of the plan which results. (The word "plan" denotes a clear set of future directions to which a college is committed and toward which it will utilize its resources.) Planning is most helpful to a college when it is linked to the college's decision-making process so the plan is a constant reference point. If a plan is developed and then consistently used as a template for decision-making, credibility and impact will tend to be high. Where planning is perceived as politically expedient but where decisions continue to be made in a manner inconsistant with, or oblivious to, the plan, planners will quickly tire and become cynical. Failure to use the plan will almost inevitably mean that planning activity will soon shrivel and die to become a bad and frustrating memory.

WHAT CAN PLANNING DO FOR A COLLEGE?

In a sense, the question was answered in the paragraphs above, but it might be useful to deal with some other aspects of the question beyond that of the consistent, effective movement generated by good planning.

For example, planning can help make institutional change a gradual and deliberate process. This benefit is clearer when juxtaposed against the institutional style in which major shifts of direction occur frequently and usually in response to changing conditions which could and should have been anticipated. A college which has a serious student/faculty ratio problem (an example to

which I will return frequently later) will find that, if it is aware of the problem soon enough and is involved in an orderly planning program, it can gradually move toward a more liveable situation. Departments can systematically restructure class schedules and can work toward new courses which will be more attractive to present students and which might also attract new clienteles. Those responsible can make important decisions with respect to replacing staff who retire or otherwise leave the institution and can do so with an eye to future needs rather than maintaining the status quo. The alternative is for a college to wake up one morning facing the cumulative effects of the situation, see a major crisis, and reach quickly for the less-than-pleasant tools of abrupt retrenchment.

Planning has other benefits. It provides an opportunity for college personnel to recognize and capitalize on present and predictable future opportunities. A careful analysis of present strengths and the development of those strengths to meet future needs makes as much sense as does being aware of declining markets so that resources can be shifted from these areas efficiently. How many institutions might have planned for the declining need for elementary and secondary school teachers several years ago had they critically examined available information?

An institution which has a plan also has a set of standards to help measure performance. To twist Kirby Godsey's point, if you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there. Deviations from the planned track can be noted, analyzed, and corrected before they become major problems. On the other hand, colleges with a plan will be prepared to cope with inevitable deviations from linear projections while those less prepared might well panic and over-react.

Planning can be helpful but there are things it cannot do. Planning cannot make hard decisions with respect to issues such as a tuition increase or the need to eliminate faculty or staff positions. It cannot in and of itself produce a balanced budget or attract more students. Planning cannot identify new publics or increase the endowment. Planning can only facilitate and rationalize a framework for these decisions and activities to aid decision-makers whether they be trustees, faculty, students, administrators or those who clean the blackboards. Planning does not take away the need to study options carefully and then to make decisions. Planning is not decision-making! Nor does planning eliminate differences of opinion. There is still plenty of room within planning activities and within the decision-making, implementing and evaluating activities of the institution for all sides to be heard and all reasonable positions to be debated. All planning can do is provide frameworks for discussion and decision-making and facilitate the development of basic consensus about institutional direction.

PLANNING TO PLAN

Assuming that an institution has decided that planning is an appropriate activity and also has made a commitment to use what planning delivers, the issue of how to go about planning must be resolved.

It would be inappropriate (and probably impossible) to list all of the approaches to planning which are currently available. They range from the simple to the highly complex; from paper-and-pencil methods to highly sophisticated computer modeling techniques. These are chronicled in William Shoemaker's book, A Systems Approach To College Administration and Management; additional information is available through the ERIC Clearinghouse. Further background can be obtained in Institutional Development by Shoemaker and Bergquist.

Given the wide array of approaches to planning, the college which opts to begin to plan must carefully choose its approach (or model or system) - whether the one outlined herein or some other one - and then stick with it. Further, once the approach is selected there is some wisdom in finding an outsider who knows the approach well to serve as a consultant during initial implementation steps. The external consultant can be most helpful in clarifying process questions so that institutional personnel can devote their efforts to substantive matters. A consultant is also helpful in breaking semantic and philosophical logjams which may otherwise be destructive of the process.

At this point it is necessary to repeat once again: There is no one and only way to plan that is right for everyone. In fact, there may be several approaches which could be utilized at any particular institution. Some feeling for these methods may be obtained from Shoemaker's work referenced above. The appropriateness of a given model to a particular institution is a function of the institution's style (or administrative personality), its temperament (is it patient or impatient, for example?), its sophistication, and its commitment to planning.

A highly democratic approach will not work very effectively in an institution which tends toward top down decision-making and which might have a benevolent and effective dictator as its leader. On the other hand, a college with a highly sophisticated system for data collection and analyis should be looking for a planning approach which permits effective utilization of that information without needing to translate it in any radical ways into different formats.

There are other concerns too. For example, the planning system should be responsive to human needs within the institution. Although the preceding paragraph alludes to this concern, it is more fully explored and explained in Greg Markovich's paper, "The People Side of Planning", which is available through the Small College Consortium.

In the long run, those contemplating planning must know where their college is with respect to all of the critical elements which have planning implications. Then a planning method must be selected which comfortably fits that institution and which can still deliver reasonable results. If there is not a good fit, as indicated in the opening paragraphs of this paper in a slightly different context, chances for success are substantially reduced. Planners need all the help they can get!

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Most approaches to institutional planning depend on several basic assumptions, and these should be clearly understood from the beginning:

1. Planning is not decision-making. It can only provide a rational framework which will serve as the basis for organizing decisions in a consistent and effective manner. At various stages in the material which follows, it will be suggested that consensus ought to be developed. In a sense, in terms of this process, consensus is a form of decision-making. Proposals developed by the planners are adopted by the community as decision-maker. For some colleges it may be appropriate for others to make such decisions. This does not create a problem. It is just essential that the distinction be kept clear.

2. Unless there is a fundamental consensus within the college community about the reason a college exists (its mission), planning has no foundation from which to proceed.

3. Unless a college knows who and where it is both with respect to its internal situation and its setting within the framework external to it (its environment), a college will be unable to move in a reasonable way to some other set of circumstances. With apologies to Kirby Godsey, if you don't know where you are now, it's difficult to know what is necessary to get where you want to go.

4. Institutional planning committees should not try to propose specific action plans or options for smaller subgroups within the institution. Presidents don't schedule recruiting trips; deans don't write syllabi for others.

5. Since life continues even as planning is done, and since decisions must be made daily, decision-makers should use as much of the plan as may be complete at any one time to evaluate options and to make decisions.

6. Planning is a cyclical process. It is never finished. Annual reviews, updating, and revisions are essential. This allows incremental rather than cataclysmic change. In terms of management principles, this assumption builds upon the belief that change of 10% can be absorbed by an organization without major upset.

7. The broader the ownership of the plan and each of its parts throughout the institution, the more likely it is that the plan will actually impact decision-making.

8. A corollary of #7 above is that consensus-building is a critical part of a planning process. A plan adopted by a vote of 21 to 20 will probably be less effective in influencing the college than a plan which all, or all but a few, members of the community find acceptable.

9. The process of planning is about as important as the product, i.e., the plan. The process must be carefully selected and implemented with particular attention to #7 and #8 above.

10. "Planning" is most often preceded by the adjective "long-range", and "long-range" is generally taken to mean about five years. After several cycles the plan may, in fact, stretch that long, but that usually does not happen immediately. The ability to think that far in the future is an acquired and cultivated skill.

11. Planners should have the advantage of technical assistance which may be effectively provided by a staff person who arranges meetings, prepares materials, and performs other coordinating tasks. Such a person should also have a firm grip on the technicalities of the planning process adopted.

AN APPROACH TO PLANNING

BACKGROUND

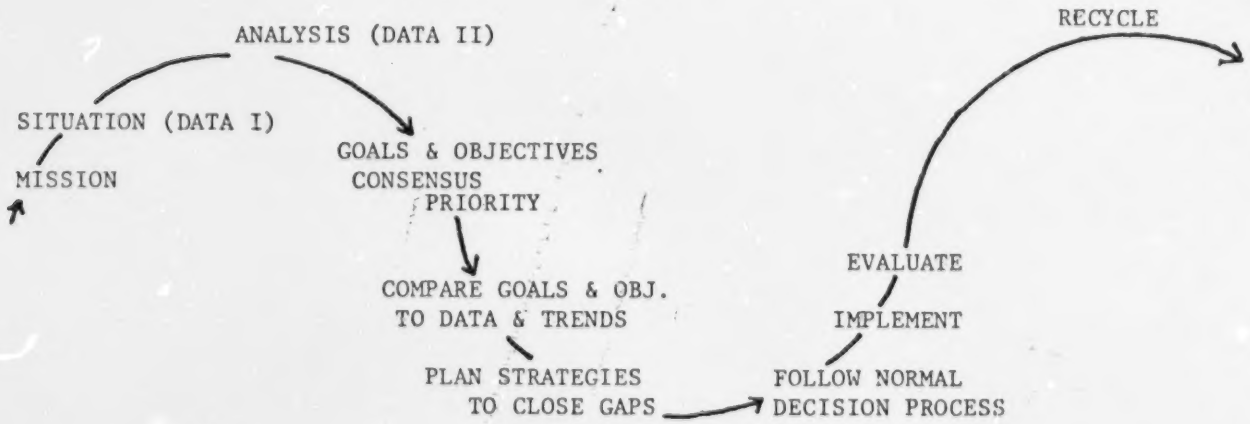
Though those who originated the approach described in the following pages may not find it totally familiar, it can be traced back to a process designed by the American Management Association (AMA) for use by corporations. Under the leadership of Dr. Robert Smith (now Vice President for Development at the University of Maryland), and with the support of the AMA, the process was adapted for college use at Colgate University in the early 1960's. The process, probably because of its corporate origins, tended to be rather "top down." It assumed that senior institutional officials

proposed options for, and made the critical decisions about, the institution's future. Its use in colleges with a complex mix of "top down" and "bottom up" processes created some difficulties which were magnified to the extent that the institutions which tried to employ it were more or less democratic. Further, the ties between the planning model (as originally adapted to colleges) and institutional budgeting (in a sense, the ultimate decision-making process) may not have been clear enough.

Whatever the reason (and many of the difficulties clearly lie at the level of motivation for planning in the colleges), the model as originally presented was used successfully (i.e., a plan was developed and had impact on decision-making) at less than half of the colleges which attempted to employ it. Nevertheless, the approach has been, and can continue to be, useful if properly understood and adapted to individual situations and if a genuine commitment to organizational planning is present.

OVERVIEW

Smith's original adaptation of the AMA model was presented as a wheel which emphasized the cyclical nature of planning processes. This revision pictures the process as a sine wave as shown below.



A simple analysis reveals that the first or upper part of the curve deals with broad institutional issues. The bottom half deals with specifics - with those programs and actions which occur most often at the component or unit level of the organization. The first part of the process is carried out by a planning team which is broadly representative of the institution. Much of the work in the bottom half is done by those who are the chief participants in subgroups using results of the first part as a guide. The outputs

of the first part of the cycle are general institutional directions identified as goals and objectives. The outputs of the second phase of the cycle are specific proposals and alternatives designed to implement these goals and objectives; these proposals can then be acted upon and supported in a manner consistent with the priorities established in the statement of goals. In short, the process moves from the general to the more specific.

The planning cycle can be accomplished during one academic year assuming a major commitment and a high level of motivation during the first (and usually most difficult) cycle. In subsequent years, since the planners' responsibility is primarily maintenance and refinement, the one-year time frame becomes more comfortable.

The critical factor in the timing of the cycle is that it must be related closely to the institutional framework for decision-making. For most institutions, the decision-making process ultimately relates to budget-making; it would seem reasonable, then, to have the specific proposals completed in time so that necessary decisions can be made and fed into the budget-making process.

THE ACTORS

Refering back to the diagram, it is essential that at least two separate groups of actors be identified. The first phase of the cycle is best done (at least in a fairly democratic organization) by a manageable (probably no more than 12 to 15 persons) but broadly representative group. In more democratic institutions, the group may include administrators, faculty, and students. For some less democratic institutions, it may involve only the president and a few key confidants. (Incidentally, there is some evidence to indicate that either type of group (closed or open) will generate roughly the same results so presidents shouldn't worry too much about sharing the responsibility. The main benefit from the more democratic approach is that the more people involved, the greater the ownership and commitment.) It is critical that the planning group consist of the best persons available and that they be willing to act on behalf of the institution rather than as holders of a particular office, rulers of a particular fiefdom, or representatives of a particular constituency. This is an important point made by Richard Meeth in Quality Education for Less Money.

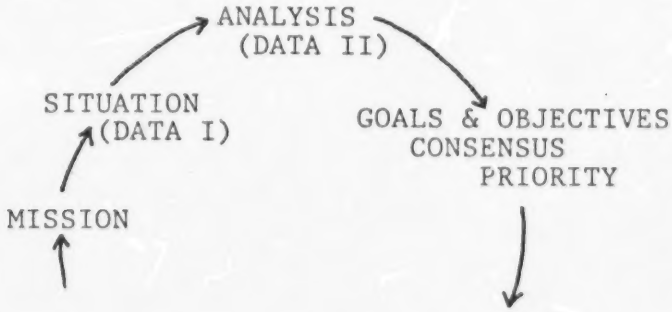
A final thing needs to be said about this institutional planning team (or committee or task force or whatever it may be called): It is possible for the group to begin broadening the consensus-building process from the start by working in task groups or sub-committees which include other talented people from throughout the institution as the need arises. This will be discussed later in relationship to specific activities.

The actors in the second phase of the cycle are for the most part those "in the trenches" - the faculty members, the staff of

administrative offices, and various organizational operating committees. The role of the institutional planning group in this phase is primarily to serve as reactor to the work of the component units to help assess whether it is consistent with the overall institutional direction.

BEGINNING TO PLAN

Assuming that a decision to plan has been made and a planning group has been assembled, work can begin in earnest. Refering to the diagram of the first phase of the planning process below, it is apparent that the first steps deal with mission clarification and data collection. It should be noted that these two activities may be done in the order shown in the diagram, in reverse order, or concurrently. Regardless of the sequence, it is essential that they be completed before any attempt is made to analyze the data or to establish goals and objectives. For the sake of simplicity, the activities are discussed in the order shown in the diagram.



MISSION

Why is this college? What principles, be they theological, epistemological, or traditional, are the basis for this college's existence? In general, what kinds of activities does the institution undertake? Whom, in general terms, does it serve? Is it committed to the dignity of individuals? Does it believe it must transmit the Christian message? Does it grant masters' degrees? Does it see its work in teaching students of traditional college age? Or, is it interested in people of all ages? Does it have a commitment to the community in which it exists?

The purpose of a mission statement as the foundation stone for planning is to define the outer limits within which a college will operate. If a college sees its mission as undergraduate education, the development of a master's degree program is out of the question until such time as the college's mission is reviewed and revised.

How a statement of mission is developed and/or clarified is a matter of institutional style. One approach begins with the planning team (or a task force drawn from that group) taking an existing mission statement and compressing it to a few brief paragraphs. That

statement is then distriburied widely for comment and to begin building consensus. Open meetings may be held to solicit reaction and/or suggested improvements. Modifications are made as appropriate, and there are further attempts to reach consensus until a practical and acceptable statement evolves.

Another approach might begin "from scratch". An instrument such as the Institutional Goals Inventory is administered, and the data which emerge are used to develop a statement which is a beginning point for consensus-building. From that point, the open forum approach described above may be used, or the Delphi process as described by Fosmire and Wallen may be utilized to analyze the statement and to work toward general consensus. The Delphi method has the advantage of keeping personalities and rhetoric out of the process, but it is long and relatively complex. An approach using public meetings and discussion, on the other hand, tends to generate confrontation and division. The style of the institution must be carefully evaluated in making the choice of method. The most important consideration is that a statement to which most can agree must be derived.

Whatever the process, several key factors must be kept in mind. First, there is a tendency to strive for a "perfect" mission statement. Such a "perfect" statement is probably not possible; furthermore, the energy absorbed, and the frustration involved, in seeking the highest level of quality may even be counter-productive. Polarities may develop which could reduce the level of cooperation needed at later points in the process. It would be better to keep the "80% Rule" in mind. This axiom states that if it takes X amount of time to accomplish 80% of a task, it will take an additional X amount of time to complete the remaining 20% of the task. While some would disagree, I believe that a mission statement which is 80 or 85% "perfect" is adequate for planning, especially during the first cycle. The remaining 20%, the fine tuning, can be accomplished in subsequent rounds of the planning cycle.

The second key concern relates to the frustration experienced by colleges seeking to use their mission statements to define clearly their uniqueness. This is neither necessary or likely. Most church-related small colleges could use basically the same mission statement differing only with respect to denominational variations, programs offered, and clienteles of interest. The uniqueness of institutions must be found in the ways in which they accomplish their missions rather than in the statement itself.

Finally, it may be at this point that the distinction between planning and decision-making comes clear. The planners have proposed a mission. They have striven to build consensus. It may now, in some institutions, be appropriate for decision-makers (i.e,, for senate, administrative council, and/or, the board of trustees) to formally adopt the proposed mission statement as a prelude to the next step in the process.

DATA I -- COLLECTION

Just as a college must know its raison d'etre, it must also situate itself in its unique set of characteristics and circumstances. This calls for the collection of significant data which describe the institution and the world in which it operates. They must describe its people, its programs, and its financial situation. On the basis of the data, planners must make reasoned judgments about changes which will occur either as a result of the natural course of internal and external events or as a result of deliberate institutional initiatives.

Many of the data may already be available within the institution as a result of government reports, accrediting self-studies and proposal preparation. Other data may be needed and might be collected by an office of institutional research or by several task forces drawn from the planning group and augmented with others from throughout the community. The task forces would gather data on an area-by-area basis, throughout the institution. For example, one group might collect data describing students (i.e., who they are, where they come from, why they come, how long they stay,etc.). Another might deal with programs, financial data (including budgets), cost data and projections; still another could concern itself with the environment within which the college exists, and so on. To get an idea of the kinds of data which might be collected, one might profitably examine the work of Satish Parekh which is available from Change magazine. Another useful device for organizing data collection activities is the "score card" developed by Dr. William Shoemaker. The score card is still in its preliminary stages and is being prepared as a part of the CASC Research and Management Project (RMP). Modules for collecting, displaying, analyzing and interpreting data in these categories are available through the RMP. The most recent version of the score card is reproduced as Figure A. It should be noted that this early draft does not include descriptive data about faculty and students, nor does it list fiscal data or environmental information as separate headings although all of these data are necessary to the development of the various sets listed. If the RMP modules are used, these additional data sets will, in fact, be collected.

Implicit in the data score card is the idea that data can be collected and manipulated at a variety of levels. Obviously, the more thoroughly the available data can be interrelated to generate important second- and third-order information, the more thoroughly the institution can understand its situation. Such items on the score card as unit costs and productivity information are the results of interrelating key types of raw data in a meaningful way. Another column on the score card particularly worthy of note from the planner's point of view is projective data. It is important to be able to make meaningful and reasonably accurate projections of both present activity patterns and the potential impact of options which may be under consideration in later stages of the planning process. The development of dependable projective data depends in large part on the availability of longitudinal data.

Finally, there is a danger that too much data will be collected. Thus, it is important that those involved select those data which will be most useful to them. Additional information can be collected in subsequent cycles of the planning process.

INFORMATION CAPABILITY AND USE SCORE CARD

FIGURE A

RESTRICTED
WORKING DRAFT ONLY

Prepared By:
William A. Shoemaker
V.P. for Research
CASC
September, 1977

	Don't Know	None	Raw Departmental Data	(solated Institutional Research	Unit Costs	Productivity Information	Longitudinal (Trend) Data	Inter-Institutional Comparative Data	Projective Data	Organized Departmental Data	Inter-Departmental Data Use
Admissions											
Student Attrition (Magnitude & Patterns)											
Student Attrition (Causes)											
Institutional Goals											
Campus Climate											
Instructional Program											
Comprehensive Personnel & Salary											
Faculty Productivity											
Fund Raising											
Library											
Student Financial Aid											
Market Analysis											
Student "Outcomes"											

Once assembled, the data, like the mission statement, should be shared widely so that there can be general agreement throughout the institution about its current situation and the factors which are likely to come into play in the future. This point may appear to overstate the obvious, but it deserves expansion. When data reflect facts which are other than what the reader would like to see, there is a tendency to say "Yes, of course," but never to truly assent in the operational order to that which has been accepted and immediately repressed in the cognitive order. For example, in some small colleges, there are sufficient data (e.g., entrance test results, rank in high school class information, and the like) to clearly differentiate that institution's students from those at a prestigious, highly selective school. It may be common knowledge that students at the college arrive with median SAT-Verbal scores of perhaps 450. It may also be known that these scores tend to be bimodal with one mode below the median. At the same time, however, one can hear plaintive concerns that these students are not performing up to reasonable expectations. If there were real consensus about, and understanding of, the quality of the student body based on the available data, more effort would be spent dealing with the real students who are present on the campus rather than dreaming about that which, for the moment at least, cannot be.

Similarly, a realistic understanding of budgetary trends, attrition patterns, or demographic data about potential markets can go a long way toward developing unified action. This means data must be available, must be understandable, and must be credible. Take the budget, for example. If accurate financial data (with the exception of privileged information such as individual salaries) are widely available, and if the implications of the figures are clearly explained, there is a reasonable chance to achieve concern and restraint throughout the institution. On the other hand, if information is kept hidden or is presented in a manner which raises suspicions, people may be inclined to spend funds unwisely or may demand that which is impossible. When data have been collected, organized, and shared, planning can move forward.

DATA II -- ANALYSIS

As noted earlier, mission clarification and data collection can be done in any order or concurrently; however, the nature of the planning process makes it essential that they both be completed prior to data analysis. Assuming that the mission of the college has been clarified and that there is consensus as to its appropriateness, and assuming that essential data have been collected and that there is consensus about their accuracy, the planning group is in a position to move on.

The data analysis process involves using the collected data to determine whether the characteristics these data represent are strengths or weaknesses of the college. Obviously, in order to make such a determination it is necessary to measure the data against something, and, in this case, the "something" is the college's mission. Do the data indicate that the college is moving in directions which are consistent with its mission? Some facts clearly do. For example, a college which sees its mission as preparing students for graduate and professional schools and which can show through data that its students do enter such schools and successfully compete once enrolled can cite a strength. On the other hand, a college which, through its mission,

places a high value on preparing students for the world of work, yet has data which clearly show that its students have not performed well in the job market, has a weakness with which it must deal.

Some data may be ambivalent. They may indicate strengths in one sense and weaknesses in another. Again an example: a college whose mission is to provide individualized, personalized education may find a 9:1 student/faculty ratio a strength. But, assuming its mission implicitly includes survival, it probably also has, in the same data, a clearly identifiable weakness.

At this point, it is important to cite a problem which tends to occur during this aspect of the planning cycle. It may be minor, but it is one which must be viewed as symptomatic of underlying problems. A number of colleges with which I have had experience are very proud of their strengths but have real problems acknowledging weaknesses. As a result, they generate long lists of strengths and come up with only a few relatively minor "concerns". In fact, experience would indicate that all institutions have significant weaknesses. Unless they can be acknowledged and dealt with as such, there is some question whether genuine progress can be made. This point bears monitoring by the planning coordinator. Honesty at the point of data analysis will help insure a truly meaningful and useful plan later.

A second point should also be made. There is a tendency to develop long lists of both strengths and weaknesses, and this may have value at the outset. Because, however, resources and energy are finite, it seems most useful to try to reach institutional consensus about the most important strengths and the most significant weaknesses. A good rule would be to limit these determiniations to perhaps as few as five, and certainly no more than 10, of each.

As in the two earlier steps, it is important that the highest possible level of consensus be reached with regard to strengths and weaknesses. The basic techniques for developing consensus used in the earlier steps might be employed again. A commonly used approach utilizes task forces augmented by persons from the college community to take data by particular areas and to sort out major strengths and weaknesses. This information is then pooled within the larger planing group and attempts are made to arrive at some preliminary agreement. That listing is then shared throughout the college to determine its accuracy, to bring oversights to light, and to work toward a wider consensus and prioritizing of the lists. Some may wish to utilize the Delphi approach during this part of the process again to avoid the loading factors provided by position, personality and rhetorical expertise.

This approach to planning builds on each preceding stage. It is only as strong as its weakest link. Unless there is consensus about the positive and negative characteristics of the college, it will be difficult to proceed in a process which is designed to build on strengths to overcome those weaknesses which keep the institution from achieving its mission or which indirectly point to other factors of critical importance.

And so, with a clear sense of purpose, a clear understanding of the present situation, and after a careful analysis of factors which

are either helping or hindering the accomplishment of mission, a college is ready to begin to deal effectively with plans for the future.

GOALS

A plan for the future of a college can and must have various levels of specificity. It is generally best to start at a rather broad level and to add levels of specificity a layer at a time. At the heart of this proposition is the belief that it is inappropriate for a broadly representative group to try to spell out the detail of activities about which they generally lack technical expertise and with which they will not be directly involved.

Thus, an institutional goal by its very nature will be broadly stated to the extent that it leaves room for many possible activities which might lead to the accomplishment of the goal and, as we shall see, ultimately of the college's mission. Robert Smith defined goals as "quantitative or qualitative statements which express in broad terms what the operation intends to achieve."

The proposed goals should respond to the major weaknesses identified in the preceding step and should attempt to build on the college's strengths. For the sake of example, the commonly identified weakness of a very low student/faculty ratio might be used. An obvious (and fairly common) goal in response to such a weakness might be "to increase the student/faculty ratio to 19:1 in a period of five years while maintaining the smallest possible class sizes." It should be noted that the goal simply sets a target for achievement; it doesn't deal with the question of "how". Secondly, the goal is measurable. Thirdly, the goal keeps in mind what might have been an aspect of institutional mission, i.e., personalized or individualized education.

Other forms that goals might take may initially appear less likely to be quantifiable. Again, an example might be based on a weakness identified from data showing a shrinking number of students enrolling from a college's sponsoring religious denomination. The goal might be to strengthen X College's relationship with the Y Church (or synod, or diocese, or constituency). Here there appears to be only a qualitative objective, "to strengthen", and there is no time limit because this is assumed to be an ongoing and perhaps never completed process. But this is not to say that it cannot be measured. There are ways of analyzing the relationship in terms, for example, of the numbers of prospective students coming from church sources, the level of financial support obtained from church groups, or perhaps, the availability of church personnel for service within the institution. Progress should be measurable.

Whether goals are written in qualitative or quantitative terms, there are several other critical aspects of the goal-making process:

1. There should not be a large number of goals. Certainly few institutions can concentrate on the achievement of more than eight or ten major institutional initiatives at any one time. If there are many more than ten it is likely that efforts will be diluted and/or fragmented and that impact will be negligible. This is particularly true when resources are limited as they are in most small colleges.

2. Goals must be prioritized. Even with a relatively limited number of goals, there will need to be a scheme so that activities competing for resources can be dealt with on a fair and reasonable basis. This step also has the impact of causing those who will work with the goals in later stages to direct their efforts toward those goals which are of highest priority.

3. As with the other stages of the process, there must be general institutional consensus regarding both the goals themselves and the priority levels assigned to them. As in the case of the preceding steps, there are a variety of ways to work toward consensus. Again, a common process is to assign task forces to look at various broad operational areas. Such task forces normally include persons from inside and outside the area under study. Goals are then proposed with supporting rationale drawn from the mission and the data stages of the process and are then collated for discussion. Weak or unimportant goals may be dropped, and the package representing the major proposed thrusts may be circulated for reaction. As in the other cases, the Delphi process may prove useful in this activity, especially in the determining of priorities.

It is important throughout the goal-setting process that participants not lose sight of the "80% Rule" discussed in the section on mission. Framers must remember that goals address only major general initiatives. Whether the proposed goal calls for a student/faculty ratio of 18:1 or 19:1 is probably not worth lengthy debate. The specific alternatives for achieving that increase are what will ultimately matter.

In addition to obtaining consensus about the list of goals, it may also be appropriate to obtain a decision in effect endorsing the goals in principle from bodies such as the board of trustees, administrative council, and faculty senate. Because the directions proposed are generally rather broad, and because a rationale for them can be demonstrated from both mission and data, such approval should not be difficult to obtain.

Some colleges attempting to do planning may feel uncomfortable with the lack of specificity found in the goals which are suggested above. For many, future stages in the process will provide sufficient clarification while others may prefer to develop a somewhat clearer picture from the outset. This can be done by framing objectives designed to address each goal more specifically. Using the previous example of a goal which is designed to deal with a low student/faculty ratio, one could conceive of objectives which might include developing new programs of particular interest to transfer students; carefully examining vacant faculty and administrative positions before refilling them; and, improving retention.

An analysis of the three items suggested above will reveal a greater level of specificity than the previous statement: to improve the student/faculty ratio. In fact, they spell out general ways to implement the goal. But even these objectives do not get down to

the operating level. They still must be applied at the component levels. The planning team does not tell the English department to consider adding courses in journalism in order to utilize underemployed faculty and/or to attract new student interest. All it can do is suggest that new programs might be developed and leave the specifics to those who know them best.

The process for developing objectives is much the same as that used to develop goals. The same alternatives apply. Subgroups from the main planning group, perhaps best augmented by others from the larger community, prepare alternatives and then, within open meetings or through other processes, strive to sharpen their work and to develop consensus and priorities.

At this point, when the long-range planning group has facilitated the clarification of the mission of the college both for itself and for the community at large, when data have been collected and analyzed, and when consensus on goals and objectives for the future has emerged, the major portion of the planning team's work is complete. It has constructed the necessary framework. The college as a whole has worked together to agree upon what it believes, where it is, and where it should be going. Perhaps decisions to formally adopt this work have been made. The next challenge is to work out a variety of options in terms of activities and behaviors which can move the college in the desired and agreed-upon direction. It is then necessary to move to phase two of the planning cycle.

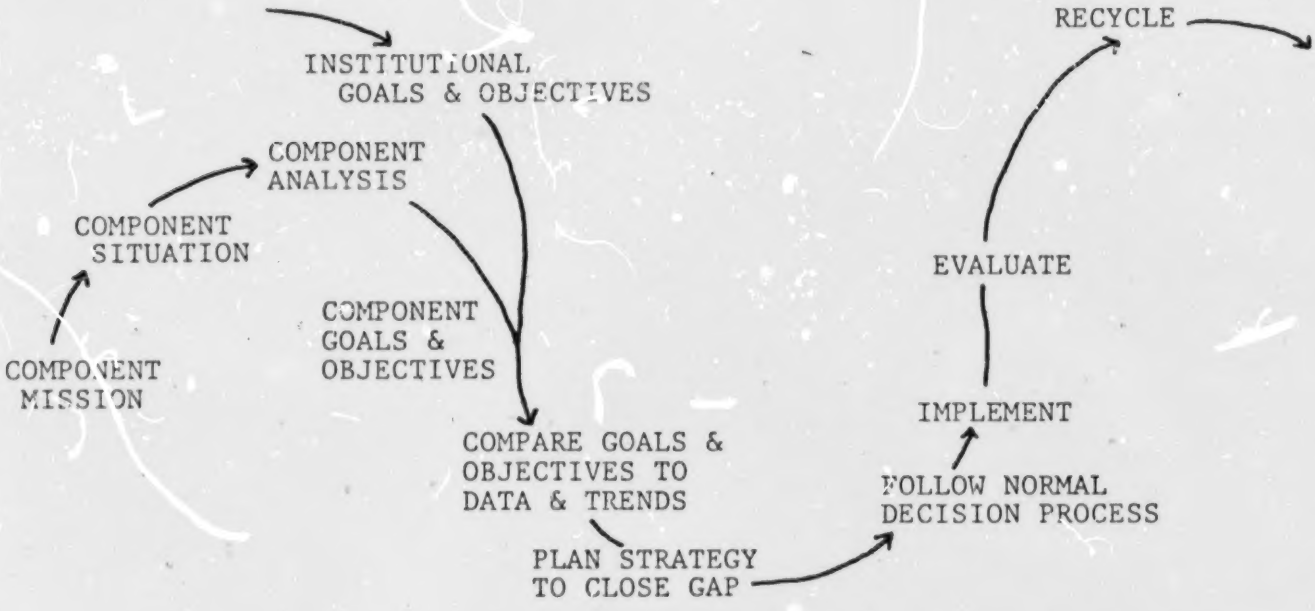
PART II -- COMPONENT PLANNING

The term component planning is taken directly from the instructional notebook which Smith used during his training programs for small colleges. If there was a difficulty with the notion then, it was that most of the colleges attempting to do planning did not clearly understand the meaning of the term and its role in the process. To try to avoid that difficulty, let's first clarify the term.

For the purpose of the paragraphs which follow, a component is any operating unit of the organization (and, by implication, any policy-making group which will impact that unit's activity). These operating units may be as lofty as the president's administrative cabinet or as nitty-gritty as the staff person responsible for cleaning the glass on the xerox machine. On the typical small campus, components will usually consist of academic units, whether they be departments or divisions, and administrative offices or other units, as well as those combinations of units which normally function together. Clearly some restraint must be used since person-time is finite, but conceivably the admissions office might want to function as a component which will do planning but the director of admisssions might also have a role in the administrative council as it plans in its areas of concern. The academic dean may plan for her own operating office but she may also feel it is critical to work with the business officer as he plans the budget and cost control activities designed to achieve particular goals. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

In a sense, the components take up where the institutional planning

group has left off. The sine wave diagram addresses this quite nicely. But the sine wave diagram does not make room for the little pigtail which has been added in the exploded view of the lower, or second, half of the cycle as shown below.



As can be seen, the components, using the mission of the whole institution as a guide, must clarify their individual missions. For some, it may be easy. The mission of the admissions office, for example, may be to identify and recruit qualified students of all ages. But it may be more complex than that for some; missions that were once well-defined may have changed. This is particularly a problem for some liberal arts departments which once drew and trained large numbers of majors but which now find themselves operating primarily in a service capacity. Thus, in defining their mission, components may wish to keep a weather eye on the data describing them and on the institutional mission as well. If, for example, the mission of the institution as a whole speaks to a balance between liberal education and career preparation, highly specialized departments which have thought of themselves as primarily involved in career education may need to ask themselves whether, given the institution's overall mission, they must give some thought to providing broader service. Of course, examples suggesting movement in the opposite direction are ever-present as well.

Once a component's mission is clarified and data collected, the component must analyze the data. Data describing the department will, in the light of the department's mission, indicate either strengths or weaknesses. But, in addition to their internal evaluation

(i.e., within the individual component's continuum), the components will wish to consider their data with respect to the overall institutional assessment of strengths and weaknesses. We might refer again to our familiar example, the student/faculty ratio. If the institution views its 9:1 student/faculty ratio as a weakness, a department with a significantly higher student/faculty ratio (say 18:1) may point to its situation as a strength. On the other hand, the department with a 5:1 ratio may want to underline this as a particularly important weakness given the overall picture.

Next, components must set goals and objectives for themselves just as the planning team did for the institution as a whole. Again, there is an extra element in this process for the components. While they must develop goals and objectives following their respective missions and must use strengths to overcome weaknesses whenever possible, the components must also look toward the broader institutional goals to which we may assume they consented. The institutional goals, because they are prioritized, should provide critical guidelines for establishing the highest priority component goals.

But, unlike the first planning group, the component's work does not stop here. Rather, the individual components must work through the specifics of proposals designed to implement their goals and objectives which, in turn, implement the broader goals of the college as a whole. They are, in effect, carefully analyzing the gaps between where the college is and where it wants to go and then designing approaches to closing the gaps. Note, however, that the components, at least while they are functioning in a planning mode, are still only generating proposals. In much the same way as the institutional planning group proposed goals which the institution decided to accept throught whatever mechanism was appropriate, so too, decisions about which proposals to accept must pass through the established decision-making processes. The component which proposes to develop a new major may need to seek approval of the academic policies committee, the dean, the faculty senate, and other groups. The financial aid office which wishes to develop a new scholarship program must have the approval of the president and perhaps the board of trustees. When a component proposes an action with budgetary significance, the appropriate budgetary decision-makers must act.

But, lest it be missed, those decision-makers are not acting in a vacuum on a miscellaneous collection of proposed actions. Rather, the actions have been proposed in response to a prioritized framework, and the final decisions must be made in terms of the same framework. The institution has decided through an orderly process just where it wants to go. The questions which decision-makers must ask are: How does this proposal fit? Will it contribute to the attainment of the goals which we all believe have the highest priority? In theory, decision-making should be easier than it would be without consensus on the mission and general institutional goals. In fact, some of the old pressures of personality will probably continue to function. But now, at least, there should be a rationale for the decisions that are made, and those who wish to appeal a decision have a method for evaluating it and perhaps for arguing against if it they wish to do so.

Once actions have been proposed and decisions have been made, the quick steps to implementation and, of course, to evaluation, are obvious. Only through careful evaluation of an activity's contribution to the achievement of institutional and component goals can it be determined whether actions are to be continued as helpful or discarded after a trial. Obviously, the evaluation data, particularly to the extent that they can be seen in altered characteristics of the institution (as increased strengths or diminished weaknesses), will impact planning as the cycle begins again.

RECYCLING

An axiom of most planners is that planning must be cyclical. Although this point was made early in the paper, it must be made again here. Unless planning is continued, unless the institutional planning team begins at an appropriate time to review its past work (perhaps improving what was stated before and certainly taking into account revised data which hopefully will show the impact of previously planned actions), the planning process will die. On the other hand, when planning is recycled regularly, the burden diminishes and the planning product will continue to impact the institution.

It is easy for planners to lose sight of one last essential principle. Planning is a means, not the end. Unless the institution is strengthened by planning, unless it is able to use planning as a tool to help it become the institution its mission implies, planning is an empty effort. On the other hand, planning skillfully done and kept in perspective can be rewarding both in terms of the understand and control the process brings to those who participate as well as in terms of the impact the product has in making the institution better.

There is no magic formula; only commitment and hard work can win the day. But the rewards can spell the difference between muddling through and a purposeful, worthy contribution to American higher education.

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